

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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UNCLE BOB'S NIECE.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NOTE had also gone forth from Mr. Burton to put off a visit from his friend and adviser next day.

Uncle Bob took longer to compose his message than his niece spent over hers; he produced it with labour and toil, with squared elbows, and possibly with a thrust-out tongue. It was written in a round, unformed scrawl; but the spelling was better than many a gentleman of higher degree could boast (the parish schoolmaster of his youth took care of that); and though it lacked grace of expression, it was explicit enough to be quite readily mastered by the recipient.

Mr. Behrens found it at his club—the only address he permitted his friend to use—and he read it with a momentary annoyance. He did not readily allow himself to be ruffled, however; and the delay had such innocent reasons to justify it that he could pardon it. The gratification of Tilly's whim would have no perceptible effect on his plans, and so, with an indulgent smile for her remembered charms, he let her have her way.

"The Anglo-Norse Company is floated," he said to himself with a satisfaction which was none the less complete because it expressed itself calmly. He took a modest pride in the acuteness of his choice of a lure. A mine to a man who had no doubt held a share in a reefing claim in that feverish age when the gold madness was at its height, and when luck ruled supreme, was not likely to be tempted by the meagre chances

of these later days, when machinery guides the enterprise, and the profits (or losses) can be nicely calculated in advance; but this sea-dream of wealth untold had something in it to touch even so unready an imagination. It was a practical scheme; it was useful; its scene was near at hand, within an easy journey's limits. Everyone—and a Scotchman more than most—knew the food value of the herring; and there was a nice appeal to the national dislike of waste and love of thrift in this proposed conversion of the fish refuse into oil and guano, so that nothing might be lost.

There was no reason—now that he had practically unlimited capital at his command—why the Company should not prove a success: why, at least, it should not prove a loss to its promoter. But it was only one of many schemes that this busy brain was weaving.

"To-morrow," he said to himself, "I shall have control of all this fool's gatherings. It is a chance that doesn't come to a man in a million; I shall be the fool if I fail to use it, and that to some pretty purpose, too!"

It was perfectly true that this power was to be his; and, if John Temple had known how eagerly it had been thrust into the brokers' hands, he might have had still graver reason for distrust.

It all came about so simply, so without premeditation, that Behrens smiled when he thought of it. The Scot had invested certain large sums at the other's bidding in various companies; the adviser had but to give a hint, and he was obeyed. One day it occurred to him suddenly, as if by inspiration, to withdraw his aid and counsel.

"You can get along alone now," he said, at the end of a discussion which was of interest to both.

"No, I can't," said Uncle Bob, with great alarm. "I don't understand a darned thing about it."

"Well," said Behrens, lightly, "you don't want me always at your elbow. You'll be turning round some day, and shaking me off for a meddlesome fellow."

"Look here," said Uncle Bob, not stopping to refute this in his alarm at this threat of bereavement; "you can't put the whole pile into this herring business. Why can't you take the lot, and do anything you think best with it? I'll ask no questions," he said, in his eagerness. "You can put it into anything you like."

Behrens shook his head. He was outwardly calm, but his heart beat a pulse or two faster than usual.

"That would be an immense responsibility," he said. "Suppose I lost it, or invested it recklessly?"

"I would trust you."

The words were spoken with such a simple earnestness that Behrens was touched by something that was half pity, half gratitude.

"It would be a heavy trust," he said gravely. "You would practically make me the guardian of your large fortune—to lay it out and increase it for you."

"Just that."

"You would—supposing I consent—have to give me a legal right. You would have to sign a power of attorney."

"I'll sign any blessed thing if you'll only not leave me," said Uncle Bob, again moved by the vision of his own desertion.

"Hadn't you better take a week or two to think of it?" said Behrens, with his slow-coming smile. "You might like to make a few inquiries about me—you really know very little of me. I might be a rogue in disguise for all you know."

He spoke jestingly, but there was a half-pained look in the other's eyes.

"I've known you a good bit now, and I've never had cause to doubt you yet. I don't see why I should begin now. When I give my friendship to a man, I give it." There was a dogged sincerity in his voice. "I don't lend it, to take it back the first chance."

"Thank you," said Behrens, gravely. "I will try to be worthy of your confidence."

"There's one thing," said Uncle Bob, slowly. "Every penny I've got, and every penny I'm likely to make, is for my little lass. Her husband—when she gets one—may help her to spend it, but it will be all

hers. You'll bear this in mind when you lay the money out. You'll bear in mind that it's all for her, and that the safer it is, and the more there is of it, the easier it will be for me to leave her."

"Don't talk about that, my dear fellow; why, you've years to enjoy it before it will come in the natural course to her."

"It stands to nature that I'll die first. She's a young lass, and I'm getting to be an old man; you'll bear that in mind, and make things as easy for her as you can!"

"I will bear it in mind."

"Well," said Burton, putting out a big, hearty hand in sign and seal of this compact, "you come along here to-morrow afternoon and I'll put my name to a hundred bits of paper, if it will make you easier in your mind."

The formalities which would make this grave trust legal were thus postponed for twenty-four hours; but, practically, Behrens already, as he sat making a pretence of reading the morning papers, was fingering the other's large revenues, laying them out and sweeping in the splendid results. He had no doubts, and he needed to have none, for Mr. Burton's trust in his friend remained serenely unshaken. To-morrow, or the next day, at any hour or moment, he was ready to give convincing proof of it.

For twelve hours, however, he was at Tilly's bidding. Tilly rose with this thought lying in wait for her first conscious moments. She was to have her uncle's sole society for a day which was to extend far into the night. She was to carry him captive to Mrs. Popham's; to save him from the temptation of an interview with Behrens; and after all, what was the poor, paltry, little space of time to effect? No miracle would happen to save him from disaster, if disaster it were to be. There was not one chance in a million that Behrens would justify John's fears by developing, between now and to-morrow, a depth of rascality that should effectually alienate her uncle's faith from the Herring, Oil, and Guano Company.

These were depressing thoughts to carry forth on holiday-making, but they were presently dispelled by the need of entertaining her playfellow now that she had secured him.

He was very gentle with her, and tender beyond his wont, when he greeted her.

"What are we to do to make it a play?" he asked.

She had thought of summer delights in

some quiet country place; but, when he went on doubtfully, "there's the house," she inwardly relinquished that scheme.

"Yes," she said "there's the house; but we can't spend the day there, because there isn't so much as a chair to sit upon."

The house had been finally chosen but a day or two before, and was already in the hands of painters, carpenters, and decorators. It was one of a huge and rather sombre pile; it would have been very gloomy if it had been a villa, but, as a mansion, it was imposing. She had toilsomely explored it more than once from garret to cellar, and she had found it depressing, when she had not found it ironical, to suppose her small self its mistress. The rooms were so vast that one must needs people them if only with ghosts for company; and when she fell to wondering who had been born there and had played out his tragi-comic part there, and, above all, who had died there and had passed thence to the great hidden mystery, the irony of the situation was lost in a general sense of discouragement.

A day spent in it, even if it were passed in detecting the plumber and circumventing his wiles, would not be enlivening; but suddenly, a more cheerful alternative offered itself.

"Let us go and choose some furniture," she said; "that may be either business or pleasure, and we'll make it all pleasure by choosing only pretty and ornamental things."

Uncle Bob applauded this notion. It involved spending money and signing substantial cheques, and that was one of the few ways in which he could grasp the fact of his wealth.

"We'll buy things for the biggest parlour—that one with the windows all in a row."

"The front drawing-room?"

He nodded.

"It's all one what you call it. It used to be parlour in my day. It's your room, any way; and we'll get the smartest things in London for it."

"No. We'll furnish an ideal study; a study where there are no show books; but just the books a gentleman wants to read, and where he may be as untidy as he pleases, and may smoke without fear of detection and punishment, and even go to sleep unreprieved after dinner."

She glanced at him sideways with laughing eyes.

"Pooh!" he said, putting a finger under

her chin, and turning her face to his, "you don't suppose I'm going to be afraid of you?"

"I should think it very likely you will be. We'll have to mend our manners, you and I, and be very ceremonious, if we're to live up to our house."

"Fiddlesticks!" he said, with light contempt, "the house has got to suit us."

"Ah, but you don't know what a capacity I may develop for putting on airs. You'd better have a refuge, in case I become too good for human nature's daily food. We'll furnish that study to-day. The books, fortunately, won't take long to choose."

"We'll furnish the parlour."

This sort of rivalry was likely to go on till the will or the breath of one or the other gave out. So they agreed to a truce. They were to buy furniture, leaving the special nature of their purchases to be decided later.

They set out on this errand after breakfast, not deterred by the circumstance that neither of them knew in the least where to go. The coachman suggested Tottenham Court Road; but the sound of it carried a vague dissatisfaction to Tilly's ear, and he was finally ordered to proceed by Piccadilly to Regent and Oxford Streets, and to pause when he felt the arrest of the check-string at his elbow.

This plan had its conveniences, but it also had its drawbacks, for, as Uncle Bob kept watch from one window and Tilly from the other, their discoveries were apt to be simultaneous, with bewildering results to the coachman. They were very happy, however, and as gleeful as two children. They interpreted furniture in a widely liberal spirit, and bought so many things that Tilly by-and-by awakened to the fact that they had furnished the "front parlour" at least four times over, and had so blockaded the owner of the ideal study that no room was left for the exercise of the most modest thinking. This discovery dawned upon Uncle Bob about the same time, and they looked at each other with half-horrified amusement.

"I can't lie down on eight sofas in one day, even if I were to take them in turns," said Tilly plaintively; "and, Uncle Bob, we've bought so many library tables that there's nothing left for it but that you must turn author and write for the rest of your life."

"Let's go back and tell them to change some of them," he suggested, "you can get some china jars instead."

"We've bought a shopful of china jars. You ordered a dozen of one pattern at that last place."

"Well," he said, rather daunted, "let's go, any way. We haven't furnished the whole house in three hours."

To turn upon their steps was easy; but to determine which shop they had selected and which rejected in so wide a range, was less easy. They had dismissed their coachman when they found the exercise of jumping in and out of the carriage did not greatly help their progress, and they had thus no final source of appeal.

"I'm sure we got something here," Uncle Bob arrested Tilly before a window full of bric-à-brac, "though what it was it would beat me to say."

"I'm sure we didn't. We couldn't have bought anything out of a shop that could exhibit such a picture as that one."

After one or two futile attempts to recognise their own purchases, even when they happened to light on the right places, they gave the attempt up.

Uncle Bob was quite philosophical over the matter. He enjoyed the feeling of being rich enough not to care.

"If there's more than we can stow away we can give it to somebody else," he said, dismissing the subject carelessly. "I'm just fair starving, my lass. We'll pull up at the first place where there's anything to eat."

It was a very happy day, and he seemed to taste its pleasures as keenly as she, and with a new softening of word and gentleness of act, as if there were a wholesomer and cleaner satisfaction in this idle holiday-making than in the feverish joys of speculation. He let her have her way in everything, and it was such a playful, bright, and merry way that he must needs admire and wonder at it, and ask himself in his slow, groping fashion, whether he had not missed the true secret of riches in all those months that he had denied himself her sweet companionship. But the doubt did not go deep enough to disturb his serenity, for it came over him again that, to make her rich beyond the common was but to give her her due; and that to crown her life with prosperity was the best task he could set himself.

In the afternoon, when the demands of his appetite had been met, they found themselves, hardly knowing how they got there, in the National Gallery. They had visited it in the first days of their London life, with Behrens as their guide, and they

found their relish for art easily satisfied. It was, after all, with each other they were chiefly concerned that day, and, when they had sounded a note or two of praise, they sat down on one of the velvet lounges to rest awhile.

For a little neither of them spoke. They found themselves by accident seated opposite one of those domestic scenes which in art make the quickest and surest appeal to the uncultured eye and imagination. It was a little bit of home sentiment, that the dullest Englishman could appreciate, and it perhaps gave a new direction to Uncle Bob's thoughts.

"We should have had the lad with us," he said.

She had not thought of Fred that day, and she suffered a faint compunction that he should have been the first to speak of him.

"You'll have to be thinking of getting married soon," he said, speaking rather gravely. "I must see that business settled an' done with, and then I'll be free to go—when the time comes."

"To go?" she echoed with a note of resistance. "There is to be no going—that is, without me. You may go if you like, but remember I go too."

He smiled rather sadly.

"Ay, my lass," he said, "but there's a journey everyone of us has got to set out on by himself. It's a single ticket you take, for there's no coming back on your steps, and there's no such thing as treating a friend to be company to you by the way."

Then she knew that, in his rough fashion, he was speaking of death.

She turned upon him with a white and terrified face.

"You are not going to leave me—that way?" she demanded. "You are not ill?" She searched him eagerly with her looks.

"No," he said, and there was reassurance in his face. "I'm as sound as a bell." He slapped his chest as if in proof. "I'm not complaining; I've no ail about me. But there's times—and it's often when a man's at his cantiest—that death gives him a look in the by-going and says: 'I'm minding on you; I'll set a tryst with you one of these days,' an' if he's a wise man, he'll give a nod back again and say: 'Come when ye' will ye'll find me ready.'"

"No, no, no," she said vehemently, "not for a long, long time, not till we are both old. You won't leave me? You have been father and mother to me; how could I live without you? You are sure you are not ill?"

"Ill," he said with a laugh that was more reassuring than his words. "Did ye ever see me ill? You'll have me long enough yet, my lass."

"And you won't leave me while we both live?" she pressed him eagerly.

"No," he said at last; "I've turned it over every way, and sometimes I've thought it would be best to leave the pair of ye to your own devices; but I've been kind o' father till ye' from the day you were born, and I'm swere to part. As for the lad, I make no doubt he'll put up wi' me when he finds that you an' me are just a silly auld carl an' a silly young lass that can't get on wanting each other."

"If he were not proud and honoured to look up to you as the head of the house, do you suppose I would have consented to marry him?" she said, with a flash of her eyes and an uplifting of her chin.

"No, no," he checked her with soberer sense, "he'll be the head of his own household; he need never fear that I'll meddle wi' him there. I'm not asking to share your life or his—I'm ower far on on the road of life to take up wi' new-fangled ways, and they would just be a fash to me. All I'm asking is to sit by and look on, an' the more ye spend and the finer ye live, the better I'll be content. I knew what it was to spare in my youth, and I'll not begin to stint and scrape in my age."

"Don't let us think of it any more," she said with an uneasy sigh, yet it was she who broke the new silence first. He had spoken with a seriousness which was not usual with him, and it coloured her thoughts and left them sad.

"Uncle Bob," she said by-and-by, "you have seen death often, have you not?"

"Many a time. You can't travel the world as I've done and not rub shoulders with it, whether you will or no."

"And you—you were not afraid?"

"What's the good of being afraid?" he asked philosophically. "You may die like a coward, but you've got to face it all the same. 'It is appointed to every man once to die,' he said, "and it won't mend your chances in the next world to take the heart of a slave wi' you."

"There is one thing I want very much," she said, after another lengthened pause. Her hand lay in his, and she tightened her grasp as if she feared he might shake her off.

"Ay," he answered with a half-humorous smile, "but I'm not sure that I want my lowe snuffed out just yet."

"No, no," she said, with a kind of shocked eagerness, "but what one would hold to be good if one were dying, must be good for the living, too. I want you—since this day is mine—to grant me one grace. No, I won't put it that way. It is not a favour I am asking for a criminal, it is justice for a man who has been wrongly condemned."

"Are you sure about the wrong, lass?" he asked slowly, not pretending to misunderstand her.

"As sure as that you love me."

"Well," he said, and he spoke not doggedly or resentfully, as she had half-feared, but with a kind of subdued gentleness, "the day is your own, as you say, and I'm bound to give you any boon you speir of me. But since there's to be no favour in the business, I must needs own up to being in the wrong; and what do ye think, ye tawpie, of making an auld man go down that gait into the valley of humiliation?"

"There is no humiliation possible in the matter," she asserted. "It was a mistake—a mistake that anybody might make," she added in her wistful defence of him; "but it has made me very unhappy, and it has made you unhappy, too; I have seen it, dear, though you thought you hid it."

He neither denied this charge nor assented to it.

"You needn't be unhappy any more," he said. "You can tell the lad next time you fall in with him, that I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, and he can come out and in as before."

It was a concession without any grace in the sound of it; but she knew that his meaning went deeper and further than his words, and had a heartiness these lacked. She was not unhappy any more; she was glad beyond measure, and gay for all that was left of the short day, putting the gravities they had talked of, and the forebodings that must needs return to haunt her, aside for the moment. And it seemed to her that the day's respite, if it had done nothing to avert disaster, had held in it an immeasurable boon in this restored peace and good-will.

Her heart sang, defying any coming sorrow to rob it of its present joy.

When it came to dressing for Mrs. Popham's entertainment, Uncle Bob, indeed, relapsed somewhat from that meekness he had worn all day, and showed signs of rebellion. He pleaded for a quiet evening at home; but while her heart and her wishes sided with him, the haunting vision

of a Behrens descending on their peace, strengthened her resolution.

"Yon weedow woman doesn't want my company," he growled, "and I'm far from wanting hers!"

"She does want you; she has pined for you these many months, and has only given up asking you because your refusals were so persistent, that no woman with any self-respect could go on insisting. Besides, I wrote a note this morning to say we were coming."

He was further inwardly troubled on the subject of his dress, and inclined to be sceptical over Tilly's superior knowledge; and he developed so many dangerous and revolutionary theories in the course of their argument, that she finally became a little peremptory. At her threat of summoning Colonel Drew or Mr. Sherrington—who were certain to decide against the possibility of appearing in a lady's drawing-room with walking boots and a coloured tie—he professed at first to be mighty scornful; but he finally wavered and gave in.

She spent so much time over the question of his toilet, that she left herself but five minutes to make her own. But her happiness that night gave a radiance to her beauty that nothing could spoil; and even in her haste she remembered to gratify his love of splendour. In driving home that afternoon they had called at the bank where the diamonds were deposited, and she borrowed them for the night. The suggestion was hers, and it was born of her gratitude.

She knew that she was offending against one of the unwritten laws which were such frequent stumbling-blocks in her social path, in proposing to wear them; and that no well brought-up girl would dream of appearing in such a blaze of splendour until matrimony gave her its sanction; but what cared she, so long as she gave him pleasure?

And she pleased him hugely. When she came in in her bright, shimmering gown, that fitted her like the sheath of a flower, with the flash of jewels about her throat, and in her sunny hair, and, above all, with that new-born happiness in her smile, he forgot himself—the insult of his forced concession to fashion, the tight encasement of his feet, the embarrassing newness of his coat; and stood amazed and wondering before her.

"You're as fine as ye can hing, my lass," he said, reverting to a native idiom in his strenuous satisfaction. "There won't be one there that can hold a candle to ye."

CURIOUS CLUBS.

THE earliest club of which we have any record was "The Mermaid," in Friday Street, afterwards removed "to the Apollo Room" at "The Devil," in Fleet Street. And, in this instance, the first was the greatest, for not even "The Literary Club," of which Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Garrick, and Goldsmith, were members, could compare with that which, founded by Raleigh, included Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Selden, and most of the other wits of Elizabeth's time. Imagination may help us to picture that incomparable assemblage. There at the head of the table, in his chair of state, is the herculean form of the President, "rare Ben Jonson," with his rugged, ill-carved features lighted up with intellectual fire, and his deep-set eyes gleaming beneath their bushy pent-house brows with witty malice, as in stentorian accents he levels some thunderbolts of satire against friend or foe—for he spared neither; near at hand is the noble, pensive face of the "Sweet Swan of Avon," illumined by the merry humour of the moment; and Raleigh's handsome countenance, bronzed on the Spanish main, bringing with it a flavour of sea and camp; and there is stately Burbadge, who, after playing Hamlet, has come from "Blackfriars" in company with his "First Gravedigger," roguish Will Kemp. And so we may dream on, until we have marshalled before the mind's eye all the wit, and learning, and gallantry of that incomparable time.

Clubs did not flourish during the troublous times of Charles the First and the Commonwealth, though in the latter time there was the celebrated "Rata," established by James Harrington, the author of "Oceana," for the discussion of religious and political opinions. During the reign of Charles the Second, the more bitter Anabaptists, Presbyterians, and Republicans formed the notorious Calves' Head Club in derision of the Royalists. Doubts have been thrown upon the authenticity of the accounts given of the proceedings at these assemblies; but they were pretty nearly after the following style. The staple dishes at table was a calf's head, symbolical of the dead King, though occasionally a cod's head served the same purpose; a pike with a small fish in its mouth, symbolical of tyranny; and a boar's head, with an apple in its mouth, was the sign of bestiality. A

copy of Charles's book, "Ikon Basilike," was burned; an anthem of praise was sung for his execution; and the healths of those who had compassed it, were drunk from a calf's skull filled with wine.

Notorious among the clubs of the closing years of the seventeenth and early decades of the eighteenth century, were "the Mug House Clubs." A book by an unknown author, entitled "A Journey through England," gives the following description of his visit to one of these symposia.

"But the most diverting of all is the Mug House Club, in Long Acre. They have a grave old gentleman, in his own gray hairs, now within a few months of ninety years old, who is their President, and sits in an arm-chair, some steps higher than the rest of the company, to keep the whole room in order. A harp plays all the time at the lower end of the room; and every now and then, one or other of the company rises and entertains the rest with a song. Here is nothing drunk but ale, and every gentleman hath his separate mug, which he chalks on the table where he sits, as it is brought in, and everyone retires when he pleases, as in a coffee-room. The room is always so diverted with songs and drinking from one table to another to one another's health, there is no room for politics or anything than sour conversation. One must be there by seven to get room, and after ten the company are, for the most part, gone."

"The Mug" was supposed to represent the Earl of Shaftesbury, or "Ugly Mug," the Achitophel of Dryden's great satire, and the best hated man in England. So far, however, from these assemblies not being political, they became rabidly so in the time of William the Third.

In the reign of Anne there was a mania for clubs. Addison, in one of the early numbers of the "Spectator," gives an amusing sketch of the curious clubs of his time. He tells us that in a considerable market town was established a club of fat men; the room in which the meetings were held had two entrances, one by a door of moderate size, the other by a pair of folding doors; if a candidate could make his entrance through the first he was unqualified; but if he stuck in the passage, the folding doors were immediately thrown open for his reception, and he was hailed as a brother. Though the club consisted of only fifteen persons, it weighed three tons! In opposition to this society was the "Scarecrows or Skele-

tons," and such deadly strife arose between the two that it was found necessary each year to select one of the two magistrates from each of these clubs, so that they were coupled like rabbits—one fat, one lean. There were the "Humdrum" and the "Mum" Clubs, where the members sat together, smoked their pipes, and never spoke. These at least were harmless; not so the Duellists' Club, to which no one was admitted who had not fought his man. The President was said to have killed half-a-dozen in single combat, and other members took their seats according to the number of their slain. Of an even worse type was the "Mohock Club," long the terror of the London streets. The literature of the period abounds in references to these miscreants; but Steele gives the best account of them. After drinking themselves to a state of madness, they would sally forth into the streets and attack everyone they met. "Some," to quote our author's words, "are knocked down, others stabbed, others cut and carbonadoed. To put the watch to a total rout, and mortify some of those inoffensive militia is reckoned a 'coup d'état.' The particular talents by which these misanthropes are distinguished from one another, consist in the various kinds of barbarities which they execute upon their prisoners. Some are celebrated for a happy dexterity in tipping the lion upon them—which is performed by squeezing the nose flat to the face and boring out the eyes with their fingers; others are called the dancing-masters, and teach their scholars to cut capers by running swords through their legs; and a third sort, are the Tumblers, whose office it is to set women on their heads, and so on." Famous among the Queen Anne clubs was the Kit-Cat, held at a noted mutton-pie house in Shire Lane, Temple Bar—now covered by the New Law Courts. It was kept by one Christopher Cat, and originated in a weekly dinner given by the celebrated bookseller, Jacob Tonson, to literary men, as we are told in the following verses, written by one of the members, in which Jacob, spelt backwards, becomes Bocaj:

One night in seven, at this convenient seat,
Indulgent Bocaj did the Muses treat;
Their drink was gen'rous wine, and Kit-Cat's pyes
their meat,
Hence did the assembly's title first arise.
And Kit-Cat wits spring first from Kit-Cat pyes.

The great Duke of Marlborough, the first Earl of Dorset, the famous Lord Halifax, Sir Robert Walpole, Congreve, Gay, Steele, Addison, were all members. The club was afterwards removed to Barn

Elms. It was as much political as literary, only Whigs being admissible. In opposition to this was the October Club, entirely composed of Tory squires, so called from their drinking old October. It was held at the Bell Tavern, King Street, Westminster.

Most famous of all the curious clubs of the last century, was the "Beef Steak." There was more than one society that took its name from the favourite English dish. The first was held at a tavern in the Old Jewry. But the "Beef Steak" best known to posterity, was that founded by John Rich, the most celebrated of harlequins, and manager of Covent Garden Theatre, from its erection in 1733, to the time of his death.

The "Beef Steak" held its meetings in the Theatre until the house was burned down in 1808. After a short stay at the Bedford Coffee House, it was removed to the Lyceum, where it continued until its break-up in 1867. The members were strictly confined to twenty-four; even, when the Prince Regent was put up for admission, he had to wait his turn. The members met once a week to eat steaks, no other dish being allowed, and to drink old port. At the end of the dining-room was a large grating in the form of a gridiron, through which the fire was seen, and the steaks handed from the kitchen. Over this was inscribed a quotation from Macbeth:

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly.

A notable "steaker" was the Duke of Norfolk, of whose appetite the most extraordinary stories are told. He was known to eat six steaks at a sitting, his ordinary allowance being four; and he usually preceded these feeds by a little fish dinner, "just to get his stomach into play." It must have been a sight to see him with his silver gridiron, a badge worn by all, rubbing a clean plate with a shalot in front of the grating, waiting for his next.

During the hundred and odd years of this club's existence, there were few famous men who did not belong to it. Perfect equality reigned among the members; and the last made, even were he of Royal blood, was the fag of the rest.

A notorious association of the last century was the "Hell-fire Club," instituted by the eccentric Duke of Wharton; of a somewhat similar character was "The Monks of Medmenham," held under the presidency of

Sir Francis Dashwood, at his residence, Medmenham Abbey, formerly an ancient Cistercian Convent, situated on the banks of the Thames, not far from Taplow. The Monks were twelve in number, and included among others John Wilkes, the demagogue, and "the mysteries" they assembled to celebrate were blasphemous mockeries of the rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

The best description of this vile association is that given by Charles Johnstone, in his novel, "The Adventures of a Guinea." He tells how the most sacred rites of religion were burlesqued on the initiation of a novice, and how at supper time, dressed in their monkish garbs, "the members sat down to a banquet in the chapel in honour of the occasion, at which nothing the most refined luxury, the most lascivious imagination, could suggest to provoke and gratify appetite, was wanting, both the superiors and inferiors (who were permitted to take their places at the lower end of the table as soon as they had served the banquet), vying with each other in loose songs and dissertations of such gross lewdness and daring impiety as despair may be supposed to dictate to the damned."

The end of the last and the early years of the present century were fertile in curious clubs. There was one instituted by that notorious "roué," Lord Barrymore, known as "Hell-gate Barrymore," his two brothers being called—the one Cripple-gate, on account of his lameness; and the other "Newgate," because it was said he had seen the inside of every prison in Europe; while his sister, on account, as Mrs. Malaprop says, of her "nice derangement of epitaphs," was well named "Billings-gate."

The club referred to was named "The Blue Bottle," or "The Humbugs;" its meetings were held in a tavern under Covent Garden Piazza, and it was called "The Humbugs," on account of the manner in which members were initiated. Two candidates were always introduced at the same time, and the point was to set them quarrelling as soon as they were seated. It did not matter how trivial might be the cause of difference, the members would take opposite sides, and exasperate the disputants to abuse, and sometimes blows. When matters grew serious, Barrymore would interfere and inform the victims that they had both been humbugged, and were consequently elected. He had long pressed Incledon, the celebrated singer, to become

a member, and when the latter consented, he had the honour to be proposed alone; but he did not thereby escape the usual penalty. He was called upon for a song, and rising commenced one of the most noted of his ballads, "Black-Eyed Susan." He had sung only the first line when a member called out, "Oh come, come, Charles, it's too bad to fool us like that." Incedon stopped and stared, but a chorus of voices bade him go on. "All in the Downs the fleet lay moor'd," again began the great tenor. "Incedon, remember you are singing to gentlemen, not to a Covent Garden gallery," interrupted a voice; this was followed by cries of "Shame, shame! Order, order!" Once more Incedon restrained himself and started again. But he was interrupted by hisses and cries of "You're drunk!" The singer could contain himself no longer, but throwing off his coat, threatened to thrash his tormentors within an inch of their lives. A roar of laughter and the cry of "Don't you know we are the Humbugs?" however, appeased his wrath, and he was declared duly elected.

Sometimes, however, the proposed members failed to see the joke when the explanation was rendered. "Is it humbugging us you've been?" cried a couple of Hibernians who had been introduced by a member; and off went their coats. But they were not so easily appeased as Incedon. A regular Donnybrook Fair row followed, during which bottles, chairs, candlesticks, and every portable article were used as missiles, until all had fled except Lord Barrymore and one of the Irishmen, who, with almost every shred of clothing torn off their backs, continued fighting among the ruins of glass, crockery, and furniture.

Another assembly patronised by his lordship was "The Two o'Clock," which did not meet until the hour named. It was held in one of the vilest rookeries of St. Giles's, and was chiefly composed of gentlemen of the road.

"The Everlasting" was a club the rule of which was that, night or day, the members were never to leave the room until some others came to relieve them, thus making the sitting perpetual.

A noted theatrical club in the days of Edmund Kean was "The Wolves," upon whose verdict the success or failure of every new actor depended.

A far more notable club was "The Owls," which was held at the Garrick's

Head, a tavern in Brydges Street, close to Drury Lane Theatre. The name is too suggestive to need explanation. There were about two hundred members—journalists, musicians, and actors. Kean, Sheridan Knowles, and Douglas Jerrold were among the number. Lemon Rede, the well-known playwright and journalist, was the "translator"—a very important office. Before a candidate was elected he had to explain to the meeting who and what he was, and in what way he could add to the amusement or edification of the society. Everything was done in the way of interruption and irrelevant questions to confuse the speaker, and render him incoherent; then up rose the "translator," who wittily perverted every word he had uttered, and made it a peg to hang jokes and personalities upon.

Douglas Jerrold was the acknowledged sponsor of many curious clubs. There was "The Mulberries," which met at the Wrekin, in Broad Court, Bow Street. The leading regulation of this club was that some paper, poem, or conceit touching upon Shakespeare, should be weekly contributed by some member, and these contributions were called "mulberry leaves." Among the earliest members were William Godwin, Kenny Meadows, and Lemon Blanchard. The title was afterwards changed to the Shakespeare Club, when Charles Dickens, Justice Talfourd, Macready, and Maclise belonged to it.

Jerrold also instituted "The Hooks and Eyes;" "Our Club;" "The Museum." But most curious of all was "The Zodiac;" this was essentially convivial: its members, limited to twelve, dined together once a month; and each member was named after a zodiacal sign. When the club was in solemn conversational and gastronomical conclave, it was imperative upon each present to address his brother constellation by his astronomical name under the penalty of one penny. The chairman at each meeting was the member who represented that sign of the Zodiac into which the sun had entered at the time.

A curious commentary is suggested upon the changes which have taken place in our manners during the last seventy years, when we note that a club called "The Eccentrics," to which Fox, Sheridan, Melbourne, and Brougham at different times belonged, a club which, during its existence, numbered no fewer than forty thousand members, all more or less distinguished men, held its

meetings at a tavern in Chandos Street, Covent Garden.

In these sober, monotonous days, curious clubs, and, indeed, specialist clubs, have almost ceased to exist; the old cosy gatherings of congenial spirits have swollen into a sort of subscription hotel, where one half the members are unknown to the other half. "The Garrick" is flooded by City men; and even "The Savage" admits people who have only the most hazy connection with literature, art, or the drama; the very idea of whose admission would have been scouted by the original founders.

BREWERS AND OTHERS.

THE falling leaves, and the last days of October, bring the brewers quite naturally upon the carpet. The brewers, and licensed victuallers, and kindred trades have their show at this time of the year; and, curiously enough, although the thing seems doubtful at the first breath, yet here is matter also attractive for the professional teetotaller, or, as he prefers to be called, the "abstainer." For the kindred trades include the mineral-water business. That there should be an alliance between beer and pop, other than shandygaff, for which it is not quite the season of the year, is certainly one of the signs of the times. The mineral-water van is becoming as universally evident in our streets as the brewer's dray—in the season of the year, that is—for, like the unfortunate abstainer who appeared before his time in the mellow old catch, "it falls when the leaves fall," and dies in October—that is to say, the van is laid up, and the horses go to the hammer, four-and-twenty or more in a string, "sound, useful mineral vanners," as they are styled in the auctioneers' catalogues when they appear at the mart in St. Martin's Lane or the Barbican.

All this betokens a change in public requirements. Strong and heavy drinks are going out of date with the strong heads which were able to withstand their potency. Like Cassio, the present generation has to confess that it has poor and unhappy brains for drinking. Hence the demand for a light and wholesome beverage, which is making itself felt in every branch of the trade. It is a demand, indeed, which is very imperfectly responded to. The light and wholesome ale which is really the beau ideal of a temperance beverage, and which quenches the thirst of a worker as nothing

else can quench it, is more often sought than found, thanks, in a great measure, to the trammels which fetter the trade—trammels of duties and licenses which effectually hinder the economical distribution of the national drink.

Brewing, however, is a matter that "passeth show." Its processes do not lend themselves readily to picturesque illustration. A field of golden barley is indeed a pleasant sight; but a row of malt-kilns, such as we may see at Newark or at Ware, have but a prosaic aspect. And delightful as we may find a hop garden in Kent, with its poles festooned and garlanded with luxuriant vines, and clustered with golden hops, with its baskets and bins, and groups of hop-pickers, yet, when the hops are pressed, and packed, and sent to the warehouse, there is no more question about them except as to prices current. Nor is there much of interest in brewers' vats, unless of a technical kind; and the mysteries of the trade promise no enthralling revelations to the outside public. Whether the method be that of London, of Dublin, or of Burton, the outward appearance of the process is pretty much the same. The vats, the steam, the drays, the casks, the rich odours, and all prevailing beeriness are there.

But a glance at the Brewers' Exhibitions shows us that if the brewer has not much to show, he has a good deal to see; while an outsider may well be astonished at the number of trades and professions which minister to the wants of the brewer; if he be also a maltster, so much the better. There are brewers' architects to erect his buildings; skilled geologists to advise him as to his wells and springs, for it is evident that good water is at the root of good beer, and a degree more or less of hardness or softness may make all the difference, between the making of a colossal fortune, or the filing of a petition in bankruptcy; then there are well-sinkers to carry out the practical part of the water problem, and engineers with pumps and cisterns; others are ready with barley washers and barley graders, with steeping cisterns, and with valves of all kinds and fittings for the same. Then there are malt roasters and malt screens, and, indeed, everything the maltster can want—his barrows, his casks, his huge shovels, his hovetops, down to brooms, and mops, and list slippers, with the various apparatus of delicate tests of quality and temperature, which go to furnish forth the complete maltster.

Then, where the brewer's part of the business begins, how many skilful engineers are planning for his custom, with polished brass and shining steel; with vats and coppers; with heaters and coolers; with pumps rotary and otherwise; with machines for his mashes, for his worts, for his yeast; with all kinds of instruments, fittings, and tacklings—all of which employ a whole army of special workmen, of special engineers, plumbers, fitters, and other artificers!

Then, there are casks—a serious matter this for brewers. Casks turn the brewer's manager into a grey-headed, care-worn man before his time—casks which are always going astray, and coming home in a battered and dissolute condition, which roll about in railway sidings and are pitched heedlessly into trucks, or rolled over ships' sides and sent bounding down the hatchways, and which, generally, are a trouble and despair to their possessors. Well, here are cask makers, who turn out staves, and hoops, and heads by the hundred dozen; and cask doctors, who will reform the most disreputable of casks. And when you have got your casks and filled them, here are the drays to carry them off—for we have brewers' coach-builders, too—and sledges, and hand-spikes, and all that a drayman's heart can desire.

In the train of the brewer comes the licensed victualler; and with him appear the restaurant keeper, the club manager, and others of the kind, who all assume the generic name of "caterers," and have their own class journals, and form a kind of guild to themselves. These last are the real "victuallers" of society; for those who possess the title are chiefly concerned about drinkables. For the requirements of the actual publican a whole host of purveyors are in evidence. For him beer engines shine in gilding and enamel; wonderful tills receive the takings of the skilful barmen and barmaids behind the expanse of polished counters, exhibit the amount of each transaction, and add up the whole without the intervention of living ready-reckoner. The very show cards and tablets that adorn the walls of bars and restaurants, have an important trade to themselves. And then, what mountains of glasses, of jugs, and of crockery, represent the wants of the allied members of the victualling department! One great change, indeed, has come over the ways of the London publican. The pewter pot is going out of fashion, along with the porter

that harmonised so well with the vessel that contained it. The London artisan, the cabman, all the great under world of the metropolis, have abandoned the once favoured porter, and have taken to ale. It is something like a social revolution; and the end of it is not yet in sight.

But there is one great subject in which everybody takes an interest. The publican, although, perhaps, he might prefer a more robust taste among his clients, is a customer on an extensive scale to the mineral-water manufacturer. And everybody knows how universal is the demand at the first symptom of summer heat for aerated drinks. This last is the title more scientifically accurate; for, as for mineral waters, but an infinitesimal proportion contain any trace of mineral salts. The soda water of general use is simply water, more or less pure, impregnated with carbonic acid gas. And as far as the public health is concerned, this is probably a happy circumstance. Then the flavour of lemonade is derived chiefly from citric acid; while various essences, derived by the chemist from all kinds of unsuspected sources, give a distinguishing flavour to a variety of so-called temperance drinks.

If casks form the subject of corroding care to the brewer, so do bottles for the mineral-water manufacturer. And bottles of all kinds were on show in wonderful variety at the Brewers' Exhibition. It is now, perhaps, nearly twenty years since the mineral-water bottle assumed a new development, and the stopper—for the first time probably from the beginning of the world—took an inside place. Now the favourite model is a ball-stopper, imprisoned within the neck of the bottle, and forced, by the liberated gas, against an india-rubber ring in the bottle's mouth.

Formerly it was customary to demand a deposit from private customers to ensure the due return of bottles; but the severe competition among manufacturers has led to the general abolition—in London, anyhow—of the deposit system. The change is good for the bottle manufacturer, no doubt; and has led to a considerable increase of consumption in aerated drinks; but a large stock of bottles accumulate in private hands, and find their way back to their owners very slowly, with many breakages on the way.

These breakages are increased, too, by the circumstance that the ball-stoppers are valuable to little boys as marbles, and can be exchanged against two "stoneys," or,

sometimes four; and as there is no way of getting at them except by breaking the bottles—well, sometimes there are casualties among them. The india-rubber rings, too, which are moveable, are utilised by boyish ingenuity; happily, for the public weal, they are not elastic enough for catapults.

But, anyhow, we have a wonderful supply of mechanical contrivances for the use of the mineral-water manufacturer. There are steam bottling machines, which will fill sixty or seventy dozen of bottles in an hour, all in an automatic way. The aerated water is passed from the cylinder where it is charged with gas under strong pressure; it is forced, in the exact quantity required, into the bottles, which have been already automatically charged with the particular flavouring required. The bottles are reversed, the stopper falls into its place, it slides down into the case prepared for its reception. In a few minutes from the time the empty bottle starts on its course, it may be travelling with thousands of others on its mission to relieve the thirst of panting London. The demand for these wares is as sudden and unexpected as the changes of our variable climate; and every contrivance for speed and the saving of manual labour is eagerly adopted.

Bottle-washing machines are a great feature of the annual show, where bottles are first rinsed in rotary cages, cleaned with revolving brushes, drained, and turned back into their cases with marvellous speed.

Even the wooden cases, holding their two dozen bottles each, are the objects of a considerable trade, and, with van boxes, rail cases, crates, travelling cases, and other packages, make a considerable show for the benefit of native industry.

Allied with the maker of mineral waters is the distiller and preparer of essences—which go to make the various fancy beverages known as Ginger Ale, Ginger Champagne, Temperance Cider, with many others. And just as the connoisseur over his bottle of Clicquot, Mumm, or Perrier Jouet dwells upon the points which characterise his favourite beverage, so with a little make-believe we may relish our bottle of English Moselle or Anglo-Burgundy. The points of excellence upon which we may dwell are set forth in the schedule of a competition for prize medals for fancy aerated beverages, just held at the Brewers' Exhibition. First of all there is the general appearance of the bottled drink, its clearness, colour, etc.; then the opening out-

burst, vivid enough to excite the expectations of the toper; taste and bouquet naturally count for most, and must include "elegance and aroma;" continued effervescence counts for something; and finally the "foam head" is to be remarked—"the frothiest not necessarily the best," for the froth is sometimes the result of a special preparation known as American gum.

Nor is the ingenuity of the purveyor of non-exciseable drinks confined to the cool and sparkling products appropriate to summer. Winter cordials are ready for the cold weather. There are Cloves, Elderette, Tettle, Gingerette, Ginger Gin, Ginger Punch, Hot Tom Bitters, Peppermint Cordial, and a special new drink to be known as G.A., over all which we may be as sociable and jovial as we please, without danger of undue excitement.

MONTHEROND.

AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY STORY.

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

THE strange pastor's sermon had a decided success with the inhabitants of Montherond, who, although an extremely rustic congregation, had such very marked views in the matter of theology, that it was not altogether easy to satisfy them. There was, however, in the fine, clear features, the sympathetic voice, and general bearing of Monsieur Vernier something which would have given interest to a less eloquent discourse, and charmed a more critical audience. "He must have a power of learning," commented Pierre Cruchon to his friend Etienne Lannes, as they entered the inn together after service. "He said some fine words this morning, that one did."

"It's more than learning that came from his lips, Pierre," replied the other. "It was a deal more out of his heart than out of his head, I thought; and, by the way he spoke, and by the look of his face, I'll venture to say he has had a sight of trouble. He's none that old, and yet his hair is as grey as your father's."

"It's more likely that it's his book-learning, and his Greek, and what not, that has wrinkled his forehead and whitened his hair. Why, think what you and me would have been by this time if we had sat stewing over reading, writing, and thinking the best part of our days and nights, instead of filling our lungs with wholesome forest air, and going to bed with the birds!"

"That isn't what I mean, Pierre," persisted the other. He felt a little piqued that his physiognomical insight had called forth so little approbation. "What I mean is clear to me, if you can't see it. Look at him now, as he comes into the room. Tell me that isn't a man grown old before his time with trouble! Learning be hanged! A man chooses a trade because it comes natural to his gifts; and, to them that's fitted for thinking, it's no more wearing, nor so much, perhaps, as farming and foresting is to you and me."

"Well, well; we won't argue," replied Pierre. "Let it be as you say. It strikes me that there's trouble for everyone; and we get our share with the farming as well as he does with his book-learning. Look at our lad, Pierre Maurice. He's a nice handful for his parents, isn't he?"

Lannes shook his head.

"It runs in your family, Pierre, to make up their minds without further opinion asked or required. Pierre Maurice is a chip of the old block."

"Oh, well, I'm ready to confess that I can judge of my own concerns without anyone's help, and that I can stick to my word when I've passed it, if that's any reproach to me; and, if the lad only took after me and the old man in so far as that, I shouldn't find any fault with him. It's his folly that angers me. I couldn't have believed that his mother's son would have been such a senseless creature. If you'd only heard him, before church, vowing he'd never marry any woman but old Blanc's bastard granddaughter, a girl that has been brought up on charity in this house."

"It's a bad business," replied Lannes; "but it might be worse."

"Might it, indeed?" cried the father. "Suppose it was your son who was throwing away the chance of a nice dowry with his wife, how would you talk then?"

"Much the same as you do, I don't doubt," returned Lannes philosophically. "We are all ready enough to make an outcry over spilt milk."

"And about Elise?" went on his companion; "suppose she's set her heart on him."

"She'll have been a silly girl if she has, seeing it has always been plain to everyone that Pierre Maurice was not to be had for the setting of her heart on him. But look you here, if you aren't hungry, I am, and there's your father beckoning you to go up, and carve for the gentlemen."

Pierre Cruchon did not look much

inclined to exert himself to play the host as he marched to the head of the long table, and took his place between the Pastor of Montherond and the stranger who had preached. After a curt greeting, he carved in silence, bestowing all his attention on the huge joint of veal before him. The two pastors talked together across the table.

"Just the spot for a philosopher or a hermit to choose," the guest was saying. "As we drove over the bridge before service, I experienced a more solemn impression than I can describe. The lonely road brought us so suddenly on to the group of buildings—there in the solitude, it was like an allegory in stone. The whole life of one of these honest woodland souls seemed to pass before me. The church, the inn, the rough ball-room, the blackened mill-wheel, the stream rushing past them all. You must have purposely left me unprepared for the multitude of suggestions that Montherond had in store for me."

"Not in the very least, my dear Vernier," replied the other. "I have known Montherond, myself, from my earliest childhood, and I have always taken it as a matter of course. It may sound barbarous to say that, when I had described my church to you as shut in by forest, and told you that we were to dine at an old inn close by, I felt I had exhausted the subject."

"It is just as well, nay, better. I am glad that no preconceived picture was in my mind, to blur the sharp, clear outline that fixed itself there at once. I am afraid I shall sound like a sentimentalist if I say that I immediately resolved to stay a few days at Montherond, instead of returning home to-night, if I could prevail on the good landlord to find me a bed, and the other necessities of life."

"We shall feel infinitely honoured, Monsieur," said Cruchon, his face brightening at this praise of his "home." "Of course, we are but plain folks in our way; but we shall make the best of what we have, in your honour. We've kept this inn from father to son, no one knows how long, and we're proud to entertain anyone who praises the beauty of Montherond."

"By the way, Pierre," interrupted Pastor Lombard, "talking of father and son reminds me, where is Pierre Maurice? He wasn't at church, and I don't see him in the room. Surely at Whitsuntide he shouldn't be absent."

"He shouldn't, Monsieur le Pasteur," replied Cruchon, the gloom returning to his face; "if I'd had my way, he wouldn't be absent neither."

"Do you often have visitors at Montherond?" asked Monsieur Vernier, making an attempt to dismiss an evidently unpleasant topic of conversation.

"Not very often," replied Monsieur Lombard; then returning to the charge, he pursued, "And where is your son then? As I drove Mr. Vernier here this morning we passed him not far away. He was in his church-going clothes. What has become of him?"

"He's gone back to La Criblerie, I dare say," answered Cruchon, in a surly tone.

"Back to La Criblerie!" echoed the Pastor. "Why should he do that?"

"Why should Pierre Maurice go back to La Criblerie?" answered Madame Cruchon for her husband, as with an angry sniff she handed the asparagus to Monsieur Vernier; "for the same reason, Monsieur le Pasteur, that I am waiting at table to-day instead of Verena Blanc. I can change plates as well as most folks, but that isn't altogether why I am doing it on Whitsunday instead of sitting down to table."

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Monsieur Lombard, "you don't mean that?"

"Well, Monsieur le Pasteur, this is what I mean," broke forth Madame Cruchon in angry tones, which rose above the buzz of conversation. "I mean that some girls have no gratitude in them and no sense of modesty. She's led that poor lad out of all notions of respect for us, and now she has locked herself up in the attic, and says she will leave here to-day. I'm sure I shall be glad when the place is quit of her. We don't want the story of her mother over again with our poor lad's name mixed up, true or false, in the disgrace."

"Dear, dear," said the Pastor again, shaking his head. "I'm afraid Pierre Maurice is an obstinate young fellow. I talked to him for an hour when you complained of him before, and I thought he'd have listened to reason and remonstrance."

"He'll listen to nothing," interposed the father angrily, "perhaps, if we'd not opposed him at the first, he'd never have carried the matter with so high a hand. I was for letting him alone, myself—lads will be lads, you know—but the women would get spying, and tattling, and making the worst of it. His mother has only herself to thank that it has come to this to-day."

"Mon Dieu," cried his wife, forgetting everything in her indignation at this new light thrown on the subject. "Thou nincompoop! Then if thou hadst seen what I saw in the stable this morning thou wouldst have gone quietly back to the kitchen and said nothing; and then thou wouldst have cried out louder than anyone when the story had come to the only end it could come to. It's the worst day's work your mother ever did when she thought to pay off that 'vaurien's' score by taking old Blanc's grandchild into the house."

"The mother may have been mistaken, no doubt; but this I do know, that Verena would have given our Pierre Maurice his dismissal long ago, if she'd been well let alone."

"Umph," retorted his wife, "then I suppose if she makes him marry her, you'll expect me to be glad of my daughter-in-law?"

"Confound the women!" cried Cruchon in despair. "They are enough to drive a man out of his senses; while as to the lad, —but," he added, stopping short in his invectives, "I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I forgot I was getting angry before you, my head is so full of this trouble, it will come out."

"Poor Cruchon!" said Monsieur Lombard sympathisingly. "I'm afraid it's a bad business. You see, Vernier, his eldest son is behaving very inconsiderately and obstinately about a girl who lives as servant in this house, and whom he really ought not to think of marrying. She is rather a coquette, and her parents were a very worthless couple; she is also quite penniless. We have all reasoned with him before this; but now, it appears, he has pushed the matter to open rebellion. It is a terrible pity for the whole family. Perhaps a word from you might avail where the appeals of those with whom he is more familiar have failed."

"Let anyone take him in hand who will," interposed Cruchon. "All I can say is that he'll soon find which is the stronger of us two. I have other sons, and if I can't bend his will, I'll make such an example of him that the others, at least, shall learn submission."

Monsieur Vernier looked from one to the other. "I will tell you a story," he said, "of which your words remind me vividly. It happened long ago; but human nature remains human nature, though the generations pass away one

after another. There was once, my good Monsieur Cruchon, a rich and prosperous father, who was not, as you are, blessed with several sons. He had only one, and that one was to him as the apple of his eye. The man I speak of was proud and overbearing, one who could not bear the least opposition to his commands and desires. As the cherished one grew up, he developed a character just as obstinate as his father's; while the over-indulgence of his childhood had made self-restraint or prudence of conduct almost an impossibility to him. When the lad was about twenty, he—like your Pierre Maurice—became deeply attached to a girl far below him in station, but whom, nevertheless, he wished to make his wife. As you may suppose, his father, on whom the boy was dependent, refused his consent to the marriage absolutely and in great anger. Just as absolutely and angrily the son declared that he would redeem the promise he had given to the girl he loved. It was not the first conflict that had arisen between the father and son; but it was the fiercest and the last. He left the house with his father's curse, and he never entered it again."

"And what became of him?" asked Madame Cruchon, as Monsieur Vernier's voice sank tremulously to silence. "Did he marry the girl?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied Monsieur Vernier huskily. "It was some years before the father so far relented as to make any attempt to find out what had become of his son. When at last he did so, all trace of the lad had disappeared. In his sudden anger, too, at the time he heard his son's story, he had paid no attention to the names which were mentioned in it. It was in vain that he racked his memory to recall them; nor could he gather any information among such of his son's friends as he communicated with. For years he hoped and watched for a word from the wanderer; but none came. He grew old before his time; and his whole life has been one long repentance for a deed which no repentance can make good."

"Poor soul!" said Madame Cruchon, deeply interested. "I suppose you think it might be like that with Pierre Maurice; but, Monsieur le Pasteur, we never over-indulged him in his childhood, so the case isn't quite the same."

"That is possible," he replied with a faint smile. "It is not easy to see all the rights and wrongs until the years have slipped away and made them irrevocable."

Then, absently, he pushed his chair from the table and went out of the room into the forest.

"It must have been his own son," murmured Cruchon to himself. "It isn't the book learning after all that has whitened his hair."

The long, busy summer day had worn away to evening. The dancers had gathered in the rustic ball-room. The candles were flickering and guttering in their tin sconces as the wind eddied in fitful gusts through the open sides of the building. There was an uncertain shifting of light and shade on the hot merry faces of the couples as they swung round with all the energy they could command, or stood arm-in-arm waiting for breath to recommence their exertions. The musicians, in the funny little stall which served as an orchestra, were scraping and blowing their gayest tunes, and the clang of the music, the heavy beat of the thick shoes on the boards, and the hum of a hundred voices, spread far out into the forest and told a tale of festivity to the echoes.

François Thalamy, in his house by the stream, heard it without hearing. He had not been to the dances for more than twenty years.

To Verena, in her little slant-roofed attic, it brought a fresh pang of bitterness after her day of dreary solitude and reflection. She wondered if Pierre Maurice were there, dancing to drive away the thought of what she had said in the morning. She had been very angry when she said it; but she had not spoken a word which she wished to recall. It would be hard to go; but it would be much better for every one that she should go and try to forget and hope to be forgotten. Her conscience was quite clear on this point; it only reproached her for having sat idle all this busy day, while her share of work had fallen on other shoulders. She had finished her preparations for leaving Montherond; she had not many things to carry away. All her belongings made no more than a light burden for her strong young arms. She had one or two treasures which she could stow away in the bosom of her dress, and then she was ready to steal out in the twilight without one farewell word, never to return. There was a tiny purse which Pierre Maurice had given her long ago, when they were both children. It was his first gift. She would leave all his other little keepsakes be-

hind her. In the purse there was a five-franc piece, which a rich traveller had once given her, and which Madame Cruchon had allowed her to keep. She had been so proud of it that she had polished it till it shone like looking-glass. Then there were her mother's long silver ear-rings and the buckles which François had given her; and lastly, she took from her treasury a small faded photograph of a young man who wore a student's cap with some Alpine roses fastened in the band. It was difficult to judge what this young man was really like; but Verena knew well that he had large, merry eyes and a fine mouth, which looked as if it loved to laugh. She held the portrait in her hand and pored over it for a time with an expression of bitter reproach on her face. Her own troubles, the struggle of renunciation that she was passing through, lay heavily upon her. This happy-faced student was responsible for so much that made her life hard and unhappy; his sins had been visited so often on her, and had cut her off so relentlessly from all her best hopes, that she would not have been a woman if she had not chafed at the gay carelessness of this unknown father.

"Ah," she thought, "why did you never come back and do what you could to make it all straight? You could never have thought what you were doing and what you were leaving undone."

Her heart cried out the thought so loud that it seemed like a voice from among the tops of the dark trees. She laid her hand over the likeness, and raised her head, but she could still see the mocking smile and the bunch of flowers in the jaunty little cap. She closed her eyes to shut it out, and leaned her face against the window. Outside there was a sound of rising wind, and the clouds were driving low.

On a sudden a strange dream seemed to float through the room. A sense of terrible suspense, an anguish of expectancy overtook her. She could not stir, nor cry out. Then slowly the horrible vision grew more definite. It was as if she saw a raging flood and the white face of a corpse, now rising, now sinking, but never clearly visible, in the turmoil of the water; until it faded and left her trembling and breathless.

"Oh, how frightful!" she said, shuddering when she opened her eyes again. "Could I have slept standing up?"

Then she put the photograph with the purse and the buckles, and took up her

bundle. It was quite dark enough to make a start; the dancing was at its height; no one would see her or hear her, perhaps no one would miss her—unless perhaps Pierre Maurice; and a big tear trickled down her cheek. She was afraid, though, that Pierre Maurice had been cowardly, he was so much afraid of his mother. She would cry for him no more. She loved him, and never would love anyone else so dearly; but she would give him up. In years to come, when she would be an old woman, she would come back to Montherond; he would be master of the inn, and Lannes' Elise would perhaps be mistress, or perhaps some other; they would not recognise her, and she would kiss his children and tell them how she had once been a child there. So she thought as she stole down the broad oak staircase and along the wide dusky passages that she knew so well. As she passed the guest-chamber she saw through the open door a tall, white-haired man sitting by the window. She saw him again as she turned in front of the inn to take a farewell look at the grey gables against the cloudy evening sky.

She had decided to take the road to Lausanne—up the hill between the trees; she was not afraid of the dark lonely walk. Yet contrary to her decision she went past the dancing room, over the bridge, and along the rocky road beside the stream to the mill. A light shone through the small lozenge-shaped panes of the window. Verena wondered at herself as she found herself knocking softly at the door.

"I am come to say good-bye to you, François, before I go away," she said, when she had opened it and taken a step into the small dingy dwelling-room. Thalamy was sitting in his chimney-corner, half-dozing over his pipe. He woke with a start as the candle flickered in the rush of air that followed the opening of the door.

"Ah, Verena, it is you—what did you say?" he asked. "Only just shut the door and come in, the wind will leave us in the dark else."

Verena did as she was bid, and came towards him. "I said I was come to bid you good-bye before I leave here," she repeated.

"Good-bye!" echoed Thalamy. "Why in the name of all things have you come to say good-bye?"

"I don't know," replied the girl, naively. "I had thought of going without saying a word of farewell. But somehow I couldn't help coming to you."

"What is the child talking of?" he cried testily. "Is this some nonsense you have been getting up at the dance? I call it a very poor sort of trick to try and play me!"

"It isn't a joke or a trick, François. I am sorry I came, now. To-morrow, when you hear all about it from the Cruchons, you will believe me. See, here is my bundle; there is nothing belonging to me left under their roof."

"Verena," cried the man, with a look of despair, "what has happened? What will become of you if the Cruchons turn you adrift?"

"The Cruchons haven't turned me adrift," she answered proudly; "I am going of my own will. And as to what will become of me, I am a strong girl, and well able to work. I shall not starve."

"But you have no friends! Whom have you anywhere but here? You cannot go unprovided for among strangers; you would have to beg for charity. Wait here a few days with me, and I will talk to the mistress of the Chalet à Gobet. She always takes some extra hands in the summer time."

"No, François," replied the girl firmly; "I will not go to the chalet, nor to any other place of which you can tell me. It is my intention to find a place among strangers, where no one knows anything of me, and where, if I am a good, industrious girl, no one can reproach me with my parents, and where no one from here can come and find me."

"No one?" repeated François. "Not even Pierre Maurice?"

"No one," replied Verena. Her voice quivered now. "Pierre Maurice least of all."

"Ah, I see," he said slowly. "His mother has been too much for him; I guessed she would be some day or other. Then it is to be all over between you and him?"

"Yes," she said, trying to say it steadily; "yes, it's all over between us."

For a moment he did not speak. Verena stood between the table and the door, longing to be away, and more than half regretting the impulse which had brought her. The wind filled the silence by whistling dolefully down the chimney.

"Well, good-bye, François," she said at last. "I mustn't stand here any longer."

Thalamy shook his head as she stretched out her hand towards him.

"It won't do for you to go to-night, child," he said slowly. "Do you hear that wind? Have you lived so long at Montherond, without knowing what it means? It has been growling like that ever since sunset; the storm must be close upon us. You must go back to Cruchon's, Verena, and, when you are there, think it all over once again, and see if you and Madame Pierre can't make it right."

"That's out of the question, François," she answered determinedly. "Tempest or no tempest, I will abide by what I have planned to do. I might have been a kilometre or more on my way now if it hadn't been for coming to see you."

"But, my girl," he cried anxiously, "you are beside yourself! Think what a storm in the forest means—a storm in the night! Think of the black darkness, of the blinding lightning, of the crashing thunder, of the driving rain! Think of the danger of missing your way among the crossing paths in the confusion and darkness; think of the falling trees and the swollen streams—all the dangers which will be above your head and beneath your feet—and do not tempt Providence by venturing across the forest to-night, when the wind has raised its voice to warn you of the risk you will run!"

"You don't frighten me, François," she said in the same determined voice. "And even if the worst came to the worst, I can die but once. Good-bye—you have been very kind to me. You will think of me, sometimes, and stand up for me when you hear them speak badly of me. Good-bye."

There was a mist of tears before her eyes; she did not think it would have been so hard to part with François. Her hand was on the latch as she spoke; she had barely lifted it when the wind burst it open with an angry howl; the noise of the water over the weir was cruel and ominous. She paused on the threshold that the gust might sweep by; and as she paused, looking out into the prematurely gathering darkness, that same nameless dread returned to her; she saw once again the raging torrent of her strange vision, and the white face rising and sinking on the tossing waves. With all her might, she strained her eyes to see the features of that troubled corpse. Just as in a dream a thought creates an event, so in answer to her desire, the dead face rose upward, and was, for a moment, clearly visible to her. The eyes were wide open, the mouth wore a smile, the hair clustered under the band

of a little red cap, in which was pinned a few rosy blossoms. She had seen those features before; she knew the look in those eyes; the smile was familiar to her; the blossoms in the red cap were Alpine roses. She threw up her hands with a loud shriek, and then turned round on her companion.

"Did you see him, too?" she asked, her eyes full of horror. "Did you see him there just by the weir?"

"Whom do you mean? I saw nothing. You would be clever to see anyone in this darkness. Who did you think was there?"

"I did not fancy it," she went on positively. "It was my father, just as he is in the likeness which my mother had—the same smile, the same look in his eyes, only stiff and white in the stream, and the water was high as if the storm was already over."

"Verena," cried Thalamy, in great terror, "what do you mean? What are you talking of? Who bade you come to me with this story? You are doing it to force something from me. You talk of a dead man floating along the stream, how can I tell who he is? Why should I know more than another?"

His manner was wildly excited, far more excited than Verena's own, when a few moments ago her straining eyes had gazed into the mysterious darkness which lay between her and the tall rocks opposite. His agitation seemed to calm hers, but a strange look of intelligence shone in her face as she stepped close up to her companion and laid her hand on his arm.

"François," she said, "you have kept your secret well, yet I have read it, looking backwards through all these years, through all these dreary days and nights, and winters and summers. I know now why my father never came to keep his troth with my mother, and to clear his name at Montherond. I know now why I have had to bear a load of disgrace all my life, and to work for nothing. I know all now, and you have known it all along. You hated him, and you——"

"Verena, Verena," he cried, pushing her from him, "do not say that word—do not go on so. I did not kill him—I did not bring him to his death. He was the ruin of her life and of mine; but I never raised my hand against him, believe me when I tell you so. Do not call me your father's murderer, Verena; I cannot bear it." His face was pale and his eyes big with terror, as he clasped his trembling hands as if to implore for mercy.

The storm had broken at last; the dancers were hurriedly dispersing in groups; the last guttering candle in the ball-room had been extinguished by the flood of rain. The wind rushed once more in at Thalamy's door and left the room in darkness. Then a blinding flash of lightning encircled Verena and her companion, and the pealing thunder rolled close over their heads. A second flash, after a few seconds' darkness, showed Verena that François was lying senseless at her feet. It was too dreadful to bear, though she was strong and brave; in a moment she was outside, fighting her way back to the inn. She found the front door shut, but from the window of the guest chamber the strange pastor was watching the storm.

"I am come for help," she shouted. "I beg some one to come at once to François at the mill. I fear the storm has struck him; I have left him lying as if he were dead. Will some one come back with me? Oh, please, some one come quickly."

But Monsieur Vernier was the only person who heard or who was at liberty to answer her appeal. Old Monsieur Cruchon and his son had gone to see that the horses were safely tied in case of mishaps during the storm; the two women were in the secret recesses of the store closets carefully putting away the best dinner service which had been taken out for the occasion. After calling once or twice to give the alarm, Monsieur Vernier joined Verena outside.

"I will come with you and be of whatever help I can," he said, "let us hurry, lest delay should be fatal."

"Lay your hand on my shoulder, sir," said Verena. "I will guide you; you will hardly keep your footing if you do not."

He did as she bade him. "Are you his daughter?" he asked, as they struggled along against the wind.

"No," answered Verena, "he has no children, no one belonging to him."

"Were you with him when it happened, or did you find him lying as you say?"

"I was with him."

"Ah, you live with him?"

"No," replied Verena, simply. "I am—I mean I used to be servant at Cruchon's but to night I have left them. I had gone to say good-bye to François."

Monsieur Vernier felt a shudder run through the girl's frame. It did not surprise him, for the rain had drenched her and the lightning played incessantly across the rolling clouds. When they reached the mill, it was still in darkness. They

went in, and Verena closed the door behind them, and began to grope for a light. While she was finding it, Monsieur Vernier heard the sound of broken sobs and moans. "He is not dead," he whispered, "perhaps it is nothing more than a terrible fright."

By the light of the rekindled candle they saw François Thalamy just where he had fallen, his head between his hands, the picture of despair.

"François," said Verena, and to Monsieur Vernier's astonishment her voice was harsh and cold, "I was afraid the lightning had killed you, and that I should never hear the truth of the story after all."

He only answered by a moan.

"Are you hurt?" asked Monsieur Vernier, repelled by the girl's words. "Let me help you to get up for a moment that we may see how you are."

"No, no," he moaned, "leave me alone. What have I done that this should come upon me after all these years and years?"

"It does not matter," said Verena obdurately, "how many years it may be. I shall not leave your house this night till you have told me all there is to tell."

"My child," said the Pastor reprovingly, looking from the crouching figure of the man to the tall, commanding girl who stood opposite to him with threatening eyes, "why do you speak so to a fellow-creature who has just escaped from the jaws of death? Have you no thankfulness, no pity? Your words sound strangely out of place."

"Yes, Monsieur, yes, Monsieur," began François eagerly. "Bid her leave me; she said she was going away, let her go. The storm will soon be over; she knows the way through the forest so well, she will not miss it. Bid her go at once."

"No, no, François, I am not going yet, though I was in a hurry a little while ago. I will not stir from here till I know why my father's face came dead and cold to look at me before I left Montherond for ever. I can guess what your story will be—one of hatred and revenge; but you shall tell it me yourself. I thought you were my best friend for so long, and yet—"

Her voice died away in husky anguish.

"My friend," said Monsieur Vernier, addressing Thalamy, "I do not, of course, understand exactly what the suspicion is which rests upon you, nor how it has come so to rest. I see plainly that you are going through a cruel struggle, and I adjure you here and now to keep silence no longer."

"Verena!" cried the poor man, raising himself and wringing his hands, "Verena, he did come floating down the stream as you say you saw his wraith float to-night. It was the morning after a great storm had flooded the valley. I saw him rising and sinking in the muddy water; but how he came there I cannot tell. He must have lost his way in the storm and wandered about until, in the darkness, he missed his footing and was carried away by the brook. He did not die by my hand. I found him early in the morning beside the weir. I said to myself: 'Ah, Verena Blanc will watch a long time for her fine lover to come back from Yverdon with his father's consent to marry her.' When I took the body out of the water I saw that the head was cut and bruised at the back. He must have fallen against a rock. I took the body and laid it in the house, there, in that corner; and, if it had not been for the wound on the head, I would have gone and called someone. I feared that, as I hated him and loved Verena, it might be thought I had killed him. The longer I thought of this the more I feared. Besides, he was dead; he could not give his father's message, nor set Verena's name right. I looked in his pocket to see if he had brought the money for Cruchon. There were only a couple of francs—nothing more. What was the use of making a fuss? He had come back empty-handed. I let him lie here all day, and at night I buried him above the weir. I hoped that when your mother saw he would never come back, that she would let me marry her; but it was not to be so. I did not think she would die. It was too late to tell when she had died. That is all. You will say hard things of me, but I have done no crime, and I deserve no punishment. I buried his two francs with him. It would have been best if I could have taken my secret down with me to the grave."

"Thank God you did not. It is at least something to know that he was not so black a traitor as I have heard him called. Ah, François! you have been crueller to me than any of them. Who knows what might have happened if you had not been the one to find his body?"

"Verena," said Monsieur Vernier, "will you tell me the rest of the story? It is a terribly sad story. I want to understand how it all came about."

"I can tell you so little, sir," replied the girl bitterly. "All I know is, that he was a student from Lausanne, and that

they called him René. My mother was younger than I am now; she broke her heart because he never came back to marry her. I do not often think about it, except when Madame Cruchon tells me I am the child of a 'vaurien'; but to-day I have thought of it all day, because of—of something of which I cannot speak; and to-night, as if between waking and sleeping, I saw him floating down the water to the mill weir. I knew his face by an old likeness. Perhaps it would have been all the same if François had told all this long ago; we cannot tell." As she spoke, she drew the little picture out and looked at it. "It was very cruel," she said, "who knows what unspoken words died upon his lips?"

Monsieur Vernier had come close to her, and was looking at the picture too. Once or twice his lips parted as if to speak; but no words came.

"Verena," he said at last with a great effort, "will you give that photograph into my hands for a moment? I think it is the picture of—of some one I knew well."

She gave it to him wonderingly.

"You know nothing of him, my child, except that his name was René; and that he had a father whose anger he dreaded?"

"Nothing, Monsieur, nothing; but you—can you tell me more?"

"Yes," he replied, in a voice that shook with agitation, "I can tell you all there is to tell. He was my son, my only one. I have found him at last, and you must fill his place as best you can; and forgive me for him. Come, my child, let us go back to the inn. I told those good people the first part of the story at dinner-time; they shall hear the end of it now."

"Verena," cried François, "I am a poor lonely old man, surely you will forgive me now that you are going to be happy."

And he did not ask in vain.

There was great astonishment and uplifting of the hands that night in the inn of Montherond, and the girl who had been about to creep away in the darkness homeless and friendless was made much of and treated with a consideration to which all her life long she had been a stranger. Even Madame Pierre seemed anxious to make amends for over-harshness in the past; and she was the one to say when Monsieur Vernier wished to settle, at last, his son's long-standing bill: "Nay, Monsieur, Verena has worked all that off amply. It was something over three hundred francs, and she has been here six years."

So when Verena left Montherond with her grandfather, she and the Cruchons were the best of friends, and Pierre Maurice, radiant in his newly-established happiness, drove them to Lausanne in the best spring-cart. They were to be man and wife as soon as Verena's "corbeille" could be got ready; yet before she came back to Montherond as a bride, her mother's old lover had been laid in the woodland graveyard, and the babbling brook was doing its best to tell him that his successor—the distant cousin—with a view to improving the small property he had inherited, was rebuilding the saw-mill from its very foundations.

POOR FOLK.

A STORY IN SEVEN CHAPTERS.

By the Author of "*David Ward*," "*The Story of a Sorrow*," "*A Dreadful Mésalliance*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER II.

A POOR drudge, toiling like a white slave for bread, and conscious that, in spite of her best efforts, her powers were on the wane, that was what Mrs. Rayne was now; and once she had been such a pretty girl, with a happy home and hosts of friends, and as promising a future as stands before most of us. But evil destiny had come to her and altered everything.

It had come to her; she had not sought it out to fling herself away on it, and that was one of the consolations she found in the aftertime. There are certain natures that find an odd solace in the thought of being elected to suffer, chosen for the hard things and places of this life; and Mrs. Rayne was one of these exceptional people. The heavier the burden laid upon her, the more must she brace herself to bear it: that was all. Another type of woman would have revolted against the joyless sequence of her days of disillusioning. Mrs. Rayne resigned herself for twenty years, and ere half that time had elapsed she hardly knew if other women fared better than she. To slave for a husband who cared for nothing so long as he had money in his pockets, and for children who accepted all that love offered as the merest matter of course, was possibly not very unusual.

The disappointment about the children was the hardest thing to bear; for, in spite of themselves, most people hope something of the young, but with Dick's departure she began to lose faith in them too. Both

he and Elsie went away so cheerfully and forgot home so easily, that she saw what shallow hearts they had. And young Tom was no better, though different; he was constitutionally idle, and selfish as the idle always are. Inheriting all his defects from his father, he inherited none of his better qualities; for Tom, senior, had been good-natured and spasmodically affectionate in his earlier days, and had liked his work and shown skill in it till he degenerated.

Young Tom emphatically did not like work, and had been born sulky—ill-conditioned, the neighbours called him, while prophesying depressing things of him.

Tom, junior, had been little more than a child, when Gordon had been entrusted to his mother, and this charge was the first recompense her life had attained. Mr. Lipsilt recommended her when a suitable guardian for a young child was wanted; and, as he was not given to baseless enthusiasms, his client was satisfied.

The money paid with the child was not a great fortune; great fortunes do not habitually migrate to localities like Bloater's Rents; but such as it was, it proved an indescribable boon; it rendered bread and water secure, and blunted the edge of daily necessity.

Its loss was hard, but she was accustomed to hard things; and, since she might keep Gordon, it did not matter so very much.

Gordon and old Tom had always been great chums. If her husband did nothing else, at least he looked after the child; and when Tom had his paralytic seizure—his "stroke," as it was called in the court—Gordon was old enough to return the kindness and look after him.

And, oddly and sadly enough, Mrs. Rayne's tenderness for her husband re-awakened because of his kindness to the child, who was nothing to either of them. To see the two opposite each other—Tom propped up in his elbow-chair, Gordon very erect and watchful—exchanging ideas with each other in the frankest spirit of amity and good fellowship, was a sight that thrilled Mrs. Rayne's heart with ever fresh delight.

Such stories as Tom told, and such gorgeous visions as Gordon's fancy painted from the materials thus supplied! The child had never seen a green field, nor any better substitute for one than the City parks; but he fancied them for himself, saw their hedgerows festooned with clematis, and honeysuckle, and starry wild flowers peeping from the lush

grass. And he dreamed of the sea, too; saw foam-crested waves breaking like emerald walls on sands of snow and silver, and light boats rising and falling like wild birds on their bosom.

"When I am a man I shall travel," he said to himself often with a sigh.

Busy as his hands and feet were all the day, he had much time for dreaming. Tom dozed a good deal in his elbow-chair; and then Gordon, over the needlework that looked so odd in his little fingers, did his thinking.

To see the beautiful world as it was elsewhere than in Bloater's Rents; to grow rich enough, in some fine heroic way, to be able to help father and mother—and even young Tom, whom he did not like; and to startle everyone with the discovery that little Gordon was a man, and clever—all this gave fine scope to the child's fancy.

But Mrs. Rayne's ambition for her darling lay very far from the region of poor Gordon's dreams.

Having been born to service, and understanding all about it in its best conditions, Mrs. Rayne found nothing degrading therein. To work for people in their own houses, and do their behests honestly, was, in her eyes, quite as dignified as most forms of bread-winning. And to think of Gordon, trustworthy and appreciated, and rising, step by step, to the most important domestic position, was, in her eyes, wholly delightful and desirable.

Of course he could not be spared now, nor possibly for years to come; but she would mention him to her mother, who would, perhaps, get a place prepared for him about the old home, when he was ready.

She rarely wrote home now, her time was so fully occupied; and when she was at leisure she was so weary; but she could rely on her mother to do what she wished when she asked her.

So the days went by, filled with their sequence of small events, and Gordon was almost eleven, and Tom was daily growing feebler and more dependent, and, since the small income accruing from Gordon was quite ended, the goad of ever-present necessity was sharper.

Young Tom had been apprenticed with a good deal of effort and through the influence of Mr. Lipsilt to a jeweller, working in a small way in the east end of the City. As an apprentice, he went unremunerated, save by his increasing skill, while his laziness redoubled, on the plea of hard work injuring his gold-mith's touch.

Then he had to go decently clothed, and this taxed the mother further; while the only money coming into the household was earned by her own hard hands.

Things were in this position when a black-edged letter came one day from Elsie. Elsie had several children now, and it was the death of one of these Mrs. Rayne anticipated as she opened the envelope.

"Childish lives were so ephemeral, they ended so easily, and happily left only tender memories behind them," she thought with a sigh, as she broke the seal.

"Dear mother," Elsie wrote, in her thin pointed writing, "poor grandma died two days ago, and will be buried to-morrow. The end was very peaceful, and so sudden that there was no time to send for you, though I suppose you could not have come in any case. I enclose you her photograph taken last year, also a letter that she seems to have written some time ago. She said I was to forward it to you, with her dear love, when she was dead."

Such, but minus the errors that disfigured it, was part of the letter that Elsie Matthews wrote to her mother.

It was now many, many years since Mrs. Rayne had parted from the old home and from all connected with it; years filled with grinding poverty and cruel toil; and therefore it was perhaps natural enough that, after the first rush of sorrow, the memory of the money accruing to her now, would enter among her other thoughts.

Her father had left her fifty pounds at his death, and a hundred pounds to the mother in trust for her. The interest of this the elder woman was to have for her lifetime; and at her death the total was to come to Mrs. Rayne.

At that moment a hundred pounds meant so much to her. Better food for poor Tom; warm flannels against the winter; strong boots for Gordon; a good suit of clothes for young Tom; and the wherewithal to pay those oppressive little outstanding debts. And then, as well as the money, there would be other things. Household linen, such as all North-country women accumulate; an old eight-day clock which would be worth bringing South for the tender memories which would be sure to come with it; and even—luxury unheard of—a dozen silver tea-spoons that had been a present from the mistress once, and a special sign of special approval.

Mrs. Rayne recalled her mother's pride in all her little domestic treasures with a

new access of tenderness, reflecting how these trivial things had survived their owner. The pile of sheets, the small number of damask table-cloths, the dozen or two of fringed towels which, in her childhood, she had seen taken out and aired with a remote sense of festival and luxury in the air. These things would be coming to her now; and the dear old mother was dead.

She had a hearty cry when she thought this; a cry that seemed to wash many sorrowful years away from her, and restore her momentarily to her girlhood and the sweet atmosphere of her early home. In this chastened mood she opened her mother's letter and read it with dim eyes and confused senses that at first refused to comprehend.

The letter was teeming with affection, affection that was apologetic from the first line. The poor old woman had known she was in the wrong from the outset, and had little skill to make the worse appear the better cause. And then her mental difficulty led her into confused verbiage, which defective spelling complicated still further; but, after lengthened study, this was what came out:—That Sandy Matthews, in wishing to marry Elsie, had demurred at her want of money, he having reckoned on her possessing something, as her grandparents were so well-to-do; that Elsie had entirely set her mind on him before any difficulty arose; and that, as he was steady, and earning good wages, the poor old woman had thought it hard that the girl should miss him. She had therefore done a thing which she knew she had no right to do, she had sold the little bit of Government security that was hers only for her lifetime, and had given the money, with Elsie, to Sandy Matthews.

"And the want of the little income from it has pinched me many a time," the old woman went on fretfully; "but my lady, that is Master Will's wife, is very good to me, and sends me delicacies now and again, so that I am never exactly at a loss. And Elsie is good to me, too, in her own way, and comes over often to have a chat, or to tidy up the house, now that I am too old and feeble to keep it right myself. Sandy treats her well on the whole; but he is a close man, and does not allow her much, and so I have eked out her furnishing with bits of linen, and odds and ends. And when her first child was christened, as I stood godmother to it, I gave it the silver spoons. I would rather

have given them to you, for you are my own child, but Elsie seemed to expect them," and so on, and so on. Then there was another burst of repentance for her weak-minded and unjust concessions, and at the end she added: "I suppose you could take the money, that was not mine, to give, from Sandy Matthews, if you made a point of law out of it; but, dear daughter, don't do that, the law is a two-edged blade, and wounds on both sides, and Elsie is your own daughter. But what breaks my heart now is the thought that has come to me lately, that maybe you need the money badly, and that the loss of it will be a sore, sore grief to you. And when that thought is with me, I feel almost as if I dare not meet your father in Heaven, seeing how he trusted me, and how I have broken faith."

Mrs. Rayne dropped the letter into her lap, and sat gazing blankly before her. She felt as if her very heart had turned to stone. It was not the loss of the money she minded so much, sorely as that was needed and welcome as it would have proved, but the thought that Elsie had been capable of robbing her, Elsie who knew all the cruel straits she had left behind her—the incessant trifling needs that her own slavish toil could not meet. And Elsie was her own child; the child for whom, years ago, she had watched and worked with such unwavering patience; the child whom she had been so glad to separate from her own cruel, toilsome life, and to send back to better things in her own girlhood's home.

For the moment she grew bitter against her daughter, and felt a hard scorn of her cruelty and greed. "Self-seeking, treacherous, plausible like her father," she said to herself, with cold contempt.

At that moment the poor invalid, sitting in his elbow-chair, looking straight before him with lack-lustre eyes and all unconscious of the storm rioting and raging in his wife's breast, turned his blank face towards her suddenly, and plaintively uttered the one word, "Mother!"

It was the name he had given her in recent days, confounding her, possibly, with his own mother, though of that she was not sure.

The word seemed to drop like a touch of flame on her conscience. Yes, she was Elsie's mother, and he, whatever he had been in the past, loved her now and needed her.

She went over to him and dropped on her knees beside him, hiding her face against him.

"Oh, Tom, Tom, it is more for you than for myself. I am sorry," she cried, great sobs shaking her fiercely as they burst from her.

"Poor lass!" he muttered, stroking her bowed head feebly, "poor lass!"

"And to think that our own child could be so cruel!" she said.

Tom shook his head with sorrowful, uncomprehending acquiescence.

"And knowing how much we needed it—that it was all we had to look forward to!"

Tom sighed, her mournful tone conveying to him a vague sense of trouble.

"We should have taken care of this money, shouldn't we, Tom, knowing its value now? If we had anything now we should be careful of it, in all loyalty and all love."

"Ay, truly, poor lass!"

Her talk was a monologue, but his gentle assent seemed to soothe and comfort her; and a kind of peace followed her exhaustion of weeping.

She tried to tell herself that things were no worse than they had been; but, for all that, she knew that they were worse, by the discovery of a cruel sorrow and disillusioning.

When Gordon came in, an hour later, she was calm again, and Tom had been put to bed, and was sleeping placidly.

In explanation of her sorrowful face, she told the child that the old mother in the North was dead, and he did not enquire further.

Gordon was eleven years old now—one of the thin slips of clever children that London slums pour forth so abundantly. Small for his age, with dark hair that had a trick of dividing itself into elf-locks, and keen eyes that looked forth inquisitively from beneath a prominent forehead, he was a child that a hundred people might have passed in the streets without notice.

Gordon was very fond of the streets—the wider ones, where there was room enough, and something attractive to be seen always, and where he was less hunted and driven than other boys of his condition, perhaps because he looked clean and tidy enough to have some possible business among well-dressed people. But there was another reason why Gordon liked the wide thoroughfares, and that was because something was to be earned there sometimes in unexpected ways, or perhaps given occasionally, for no reason that he could comprehend.

Gordon had never been taught to beg. Neither by inheritance nor by education was there a solitary trait of the mendicant in the child. In Mrs. Rayne's eyes, next to stealing, begging would have been the direst offence; but when Gordon could earn pennies honestly she was very glad; or when strangers dropped a coin into his empty little hand, impelled thereto by sympathy with something in his clear, frank glance, she was grateful.

That Gordon never solicited the money that was given him, young Tom alone permitted himself not only to doubt but to disbelieve. In Tom's opinion the respectable classes did not disburse coppers to youngsters without solicitation; but that Gordon should beg was in Tom's eyes, not only excuseable, but praiseworthy. "And he has that kind of a way with him, that if he went about it cleverly, he might earn something for the whole of us," Tom told himself, with feeling.

The more Tom thought of Gordon's possibilities in this direction, the more disgusted he grew that such a fine vein of gold remained unworked. He knew, from enquiring about it, what a rich harvest some beggars reaped, and he did not see why Gordon could not have a hand in it too. Of course there was no need to tell mother that he begged, she was squeamish and absurd; but to please her he could call himself a crossing-sweeper or a news-boy.

As long as Gordon's little annuity had been in existence, there had not been a word with Tom junior, or anyone, regarding Gordon's duty in the matter of bread-winning; but when that failed, and times grew harder, young Tom felt himself filled with a noble scorn of the child who was a burden and an idler.

Tom was an idler himself, but of course the cases were not at all parallel; he was a son of the house, and had a future full of possibilities. Something easy and remunerative would be sure to turn up for him, and in any case there was always the jewellery business.

It was about a month before his grandmother's death that Tom had entered on a holiday from his apprenticeship. Times were bad, he said, and his master had no immediate need of him; he was, therefore, to remain at home till he was sent for; and Mrs. Rayne did not question his statement, perhaps because she was afraid. But when

day after day passed, and "old master" made no sign, and when the expectation of being sent for kept Tom from seeking other more profitable employment, Mrs. Rayne decided to see Mr. Lipsilt.

It was Mr. Lipsilt who had helped Tom towards his apprenticeship and gone surety for his good behaviour, and after Tom had lounged and loafed more than a year at home, she thought it time to speak to the lawyer, whom she dreaded, though knowing he meant to be kind; his uncompromising views in every-day matters, and his terse way of uttering them, frightened her.

Mr. Lipsilt was busier than ever now; and Mrs. Rayne had to wait longer than before; but he received her at last, looking broader, and bigger, and redder than at their previous interview; and she more limp and dingy by comparison.

"I came to ask about Tom," she said flutteringly, her lips feeling quite dry as she spoke.

"Ah, about Tom!" Mr. Lipsilt leaned back in his chair, and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat. "You mean your excellent son, I presume."

"Yes, sir, you remember you got him apprenticed to Mr. Studd, the jeweller?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And Mr. Studd sent him home for a time, because work was slack. He was to recall him when he wanted him; but he has not recalled him yet."

"Ah, he told you so. I am afraid he rather—misinterpreted. Mr. Studd does not intend to recall him, having dismissed him—for theft. Here, Judson," ringing the bell violently, "a glass of water. Confound the woman, she has fainted."

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